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SUBJECT: SUDANESE MFA BRIEFS KHARTOUM DIPLOMATIC CORPS

REF: A) KHARTOUM 716
B) KHARTOUM 717
C) KHARTOUM 719

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: On May 13 at 11:00 A.M. (local time) Mutriff Sadiq, the Undersecretary at the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accompanied by a Sudanese Army General, briefed Khartoum's Ambassadors on the Justice and Equality Movement's attack on Omdurman, across the Nile from the Sudanese capital. Throughout the briefing, Sadiq aggressively emphasized Chad's support for the operation. Sadiq also stated that the GoS will not use this as an opportunity to unfairly detain Darfuris, attack rebel groups, or change the GoS's stance on negotiations with rebel movements. END SUMMARY.

RECAP OF JEM OPERATION

¶2. (SBU) Sadiq opened the session calling JEM's operation a "suicidal attack." He stated that the MFA warned the diplomatic community about the impending JEM attack on May 9, and "this is exactly what happened as we expected." He stated that the Sudanese Armed Forces, in order to avoid bloody street fighting in heavily populated sections of Khartoum's sprawling suburb, directed the fighting to two of the least populated areas in Omdurman: 1) Al-'Arda Street (between Street 40 and Mua'arid Street) and 2) The Inqaz bridge. Sadiq implied that some JEM fighters may have made it to the half-way point of this bridge across the Nile. According to Sadiq, the JEM fighters incorrectly expected additional support from SAF defectors and the general population in Omdurman. They failed utterly to take any military objective in Omdurman such as the Wadi Sayidna Base or Military Engineers Unit.

CHADIAN LINK

¶3. (SBU) Sadiq stated that the JEM fighters relied upon cell phones for the communications, and that this enabled the GoS to intercept and gain valuable intelligence. When the local populace failed to rise, JEM called the Chadian Embassy. According to Sadiq, the Chadian Embassy in Khartoum was "an important point of contact for JEM." He stated that contacts within the Chadian Embassy encouraged JEM fighters to cross over into Khartoum and capture the Mogran water station and the Central Bank of Sudan. "After we intercepted these communications we directed our forces to prevent this from happening, and we gained decisive battles to stop this," stated Sadiq. Sadiq stated that the GoS acquired Chadian passports, identity cards, communications equipment, and weapons from the fighters - all of which is evidence for Chad's support of this operation. (Note: Approximately ten Chadian passports, identity cards, birth certificates and other documents were on display following the briefing. End Note). Sadiq noted that the Chadian Ambassador departed Sudan prior to the attack, and claimed the Chadian security attach in Khartoum was directly involved in the operation.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

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14. (SBU) Sadiq stated that all JEM fighters have been captured, except for those who fled and a small number who attempted to incorporate themselves into the civilian population in Omdurman. With respect to the latter, he stated that "every hour we catch more of the fighters who have left their weapons and taken off their uniforms." He stated that GoS security caught two such individuals in central Khartoum on May 12. He stated that this incident was complicated by the involvement of many different GoS police, security, and military groups, and that the number of forces on the street has been reduced since then (one report we have heard is that GoS units mistakenly fired on each other) and checkpoints eliminated in Khartoum. He stated that fleeing JEM fighters "have scattered all over," with some moving into White Nile and North Kordofan states, running out of gas and being swept up in small numbers.

15. (SBU) Sadiq said that he could not discount that JEM would attempt to fall on UNAMID or SAF units in Darfur, or even on other Darfuri rebel movements. Some rebels had taken advantage of JEM's absence to raid its bases in Darfur and, in any case, "JEM wants to be the only rebel group in Darfur." He did admit that the movements of the Sudanese Army had been "slow and the chain of command, long" and that the more nimble rebels had taken advantage of this.

16. (SBU) Sadiq boasted that more GoS military and security forces were ready for action, but that "we did not need all the forces to crush JEM." He stated that the JEM attack has had an effect on Omdurman's civilian population, with a number civilian casualties. He stated that many buildings were damaged or destroyed (including one mosque) and that four banks were taken by the JEM fighters. Sadiq emphasized the attack's impact on the civilian population, stating that "the number of casualties and wounded for the military

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were normal and what one would expect." Sadiq stated that by the afternoon of May 14, movements should entirely return to normal in Omdurman. He noted that May 13 will be a "crucial day" for returning life to normal in Omdurman and Khartoum, but warned that "we should not exclude the possibility of other attacks by JEM," especially as they attempt to prove that they are still alive and well.

POLITICAL AND ETHNIC DETENTIONS

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17. (SBU) Sadiq said the GoS is sensitive to the situation of ethnic Zaghawans and other ethnic groups in Darfur and that it had "issued a clear statement" that it will avoid ethnically and geographically-based detentions. He stated that the people of Darfur have been very helpful in providing information to the GoS's security apparatus. CDA Fernandez stated that he appreciated this statement and that the international community will continue to monitor detentions and any operations which target individuals based on ethnicity. He added that there should be no ethnic targeting either in Khartoum or in Darfur.

18. (SBU) Responding to a question regarding Popular Congress leader Hassan Al-Turabi, Sadiq stated that it was very clear that "individuals from the Popular Congress Party are sympathizers with JEM." He said that "it was no coincidence that they were outside of Khartoum in the city of Sinar for five days, just like the absence of the Chadian Ambassador from Khartoum." He added that the GoS has evidence of the PCP's involvement in the operation, and that it released Turabi "just so that it will not grab all of the media's attention."

GOS RESPONSE

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19. (SBU) Sadiq stated that the individuals responsible for the attack should be "called terrorists as they committed crimes against humanity." He noted that one of the JEM trucks used in the attack was a looted WFP truck used for humanitarian assistance, which JEM had converted to military use. He stated that the GoS will present warrants for the arrest of JEM leaders to countries which harbor JEM leaders. He stated that the GoS has appreciated the statements of condemnation made by the international community, including the US, and hinted at other countries who "offered more help than just

condemnations". He then announced that the Ethiopian FM had just arrived in Khartoum.

¶10. (SBU) Sadiq stated that the GoS is still committed to negotiating with rebel factions (including JEM "if they change their ways.") He said the GoS still plans on participating in JMST-led security discussions scheduled for late May in Geneva, and the GoS will not try to exploit this opportunity to "liquidate" rebel movements. He emphasized that "if JEM indicates that they are ready for peace, we are ready to consider it, but we know that Khalil Ibrahim is not for negotiations. If they change, we will give them a chance." He said that JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim is power-hungry, an adventurer, isolated from his own people, an agent of the Chadians, and a coward who exploited child soldiers. On the last point, he stated that captured child combatants would be handed over to the ICRC.

¶11. (SBU) Sadiq said that the GoS does not have any ambitions in Chad, "although we could harm the Chadians and remove Deby, if we wanted to." Specifically and harshly addressing the French Ambassador, Sadiq said "you know about Chadian involvement in this better than anyone, we asked for your help many times and you need to alert our neighbor that we hold them accountable."

COMMENT

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¶12. Sadiq said many of the right things on May 13 to assuage the concerns of Khartoum's diplomatic community. He emphasized that the GoS directed the fighting to areas with low population density, that it will avoid targeting Darfurians, and that it will continue to talk with other Darfur rebel movements. However, some of what he said must be taken with a large grain of salt since it obviously downplays the serious concerns of the regime at the time of the attack, and portrays GOS forces as having been entirely in control of events throughout the fighting. Moreover, although Sadiq opened the briefing saying that the attack was both expected and controlled by the GoS security apparatus, he conveyed a number of details which shows how close JEM was to achieving its very ambitious goals. According to Sadiq, JEM avoided a SAF operation to keep them out of the city, took over Omdurman's banks, may have made it onto one of the bridges leading to Khartoum, and was close to moving into Khartoum (were it not for the GoS's victory in several "decisive battles.") Sadiq showed the most emotion while emphatically addressing the French Ambassador, encouraging France to convey to Chad that Sudan holds Chad accountable.

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FERNANDEZ